



The Surveys

We have summarized the best thinking of nearly 1,900ⁱ court professionals who, over 15 years, have helped review 266 different possible scenarios of the future. This report highlights the more recent assessments, focuses on responses from NACM members, and compares their assessments with those of the overall group.

The surveys have sought to answer the question: What is the most likely future for the courts? By assessing the probability of various scenarios occurring within the next ten years, then averaging those results, we have developed estimates of the future of courts. Assessments averaging from 1.0 to 1.9 are labeled *Highly Likely*; 2.0 to 2.4 - *Likely*; 2.5 to 2.9 - *Maybe (50-50 Chance)*; 3.0 to 3.4 - *Unlikely*; 3.5 and higher - *Improbable*.

We also invite you to visit the <https://www.Courtleader.net> website. Janet Cornell hosts the site where a variety of episodes of the Court Leader's Advantage Podcast Series take a more in-depth look at many of the scenarios. You can request a full set of survey results by emailing us at CourtFutures@gmail.com.

No. 10: Courts Increase Calls for More Funding to Guard Against Physical & Cyber Threats to Judges

Facing rising concerns over judge safety due to threats and violent incidents, judicial leaders and staff call for increased funding to strengthen security, including controlled access, surveillance systems, stronger computer firewalls, and protective personnel. A recent U.S. Marshal's Service report stated that there have been over 800 threats against federal judicial officers in 2025 and the first part of 2026.ⁱⁱ

Courts Increase Calls for More Funding to Guard Against Physical & Cyber Threats to Judges	Overall Group
	Highly Likely

The overall group assessed this scenario as having a 1.6 probability; NACM members assessed the scenario as having a 1.6 likelihood; non-NACM respondents assessed it as less likely with a 1.8 probability.

No. 9: Courts Adopt a "Zero-Trust" Technology Model

Organizations, including courts, move away from automatic internal trust. They no longer assume that users or systems are safe. Instead, they require continuous verification of users, devices, and applications. Limiting access to the minimum necessary to do the job. Strong identity controls and encrypted communications become standard. Real-time analytics and centralized oversight help detect unusual activity and contain threats. Security plans follows an "assume breach" mindset. At the same time, courts balance security with usability. Decision-makers still need timely and appropriate information to make sound choices. Currently, 61% of organizations worldwide have launched "zero trust" initiatives.ⁱⁱⁱ

Theme	Overall Group
Courts Organizations Adopt a Zero-Trust Technology Model	Likely

The overall group assessed this scenario as having a 2.1 likelihood; NACM members gave it a 2.0 likelihood; non-NACM respondents gave it a 2.1 likelihood.

No. 8: Cybersecurity Continues to Be a Major Issue for Courts

This trend appeared in last year's report, but recent events suggest that it is becoming more, not less, important. Courts depend on electronic case-management systems, online filing, digital evidence, remote access, and interconnected networks. At the same time, those systems have become attractive targets for ransomware, data theft, phishing, denial-of-service attacks, and other increasingly sophisticated threats.

The National Center for State Courts reports that disruptive cyber incidents experienced by courts nearly doubled between 2017 and 2021. The 2025 NCSC cybersecurity guidance explicitly describes cybersecurity as a core component of judicial operations and public trust.

Theme	Overall Group
Cybersecurity Continues to Be a Major Issue for Courts	Highly Likely

The overall group assessed this scenario as having a 1.6 likelihood; NACM members gave it a 1.5 likelihood; non-NACM respondents gave it a 1.6 likelihood.

No. 7: Courts Rethink Hiring and Retention Amid Shrinking Talent Pools

Courts continue to struggle with declining applicant pools, especially for specialized roles like court reporters, interpreters, IT specialists, court navigators, and deputy clerks. Interest in public-sector work wanes, the workforce continues to age out, the broader labor market cools, courts shift from credential-based hiring to skills-focused approaches, emphasizing micro-credentials, tech fluency, customer service abilities, and continuous learning to attract a wider range of candidates. At the same time, leaders prioritize retention by redesigning career pathways and investing in flexible work options, mental-health support, and healthier workplace environments. Texas reported that 45% court and clerk offices are experiencing difficulties hiring staff.^{iv} In California court reporters are declining despite aggressive recruiting.^v

Theme	Overall Group
Courts Rethink Hiring and Retention Amid Shrinking Talent Pools	Likely

The overall group, including both NACM and non-NACM respondents, assessed this scenario as having a 2.0 likelihood.

No. 6: Artificial Intelligence Drives Rapid Reskilling

AI is reshaping court work, requiring staff and judges to develop hybrid skills that blend technical fluency with communication and problem-solving. Automation shifts routine tasks to complex problem-solving and public interaction. New roles that will require reskilling include AI Workflow Specialist: identifies repetitive work, designs AI-assisted workflows, and uses AI agents to automate portions of the job; AI Quality and Oversight Specialist: checks AI-generated work, identifies hallucinations and errors, decides when human review is required; AI Training Specialist: teaches coworkers to use AI effectively and safely.

Theme	Overall Group
Artificial Intelligence Drives Rapid Reskilling	Likely

The overall group assessed this scenario as having a 2.1 likelihood; NACM members gave it a 2.0 likelihood; non-NACM respondents gave it a 2.2 likelihood.

No. 5: Litigants Turn to Online Legal Advice

This scenario was run in the 2023 survey. Websites and blogs that provide litigants with legal advice and court strategies cover an array of dispute types such as landlord–tenant actions, child custody and support, foreclosures, defaults, traffic and parking tickets, and drunk driving. Demand for attorneys continues to decline. Since then, the numbers of self-represented litigants using Chat GPT, Claude, Gemini, and other AI tools to assist in developing their legal documents has skyrocketed.

Theme	Overall Group
Litigants Turn to Online Legal Advice	Highly Likely

The overall group assessed the scenario as having a 1.9 probability; NACM members assessed the scenario as **Highly Likely** giving it a 1.9 likelihood; non-NACM respondents assessed it as **Likely** giving it a 2.0 probability.

No. 4: Artificial Intelligence Helps Courts Statistically Track Bail Decisions, Verdicts, & Sentences

As a way to address potential systemic bias, courts use AI to track and statistically report bail decisions, verdicts, and sentences by defendant race, gender, age, and socio-economic status. The federal judiciary currently uses a Pretrial Risk Assessment to estimate an individual's risk in bail decisions and the JSIN

(Judiciary Sentencing Information), which allows judges to examine sentencing data. Lawyers and researchers currently use AI to analyze judicial decisions and jury verdicts.

Theme	Overall Group
<i>AI Helps Courts Statistically Track Bail Decisions, Verdicts, & Sentences</i>	<i>Likely</i>

The overall group assessed this scenario as having a 2.1 likelihood; NACM members gave it a 2.0 likelihood; non-NACM respondents gave it a 2.3 likelihood.

No. 3: Household & Family Structures Continue to Change

Household and family structures shift, driven in part by economic pressures, changing marriage and divorce rates, and more community acceptance of diverse family arrangements. These changes impact housing needs, consumer behavior, and demands on social services. Courts see more cases involving a wide range of family situations, stemming from complex issues related to custody, caregiving, and guardianship. As a result, courts adjust by updating forms, giving clearer communication, and refreshing processes to reflect evolving family realities.^{vi}

Theme	Overall Group
<i>Household & Family Structures Continue to Change</i>	<i>Likely</i>

The overall group, NACM members, and non-NACM respondents all assessed this scenario as Likely with a 2.0 probability.

No. 2: The Population Continues to Age

As Baby Boomers retire and longevity rises, aging becomes a dominant force shaping public institutions. Demand for healthcare and elder care surges, Social Security strains, and the labor force contracts. Courts see a sharp rise in complex cases involving older adults: guardianship, elder abuse, financial exploitation, housing, and healthcare disputes. Seniors increasingly appear as litigants, victims, and witnesses; more trials are interrupted by medical events.^{vii}

Theme	Overall Group
<i>The Population Continues to Age</i>	<i>Likely</i>

The overall group, NACM members, and non-NACM respondents all assessed this scenario as Likely with a 2.2 probability.

No. 1: The Pace of Artificial Intelligence Change Increasingly Challenges Court Governance Policies

Courts face uneven use of AI across departments. They face greater data and security risks. Regulatory guidance remains uncertain, and court leaders must decide how to respond. They must determine whether to tolerate unchecked AI in filings or require new standards for disclosure and verification.^{viii}

Theme	Overall Group
<i>The Pace of Change in AI Increasingly Challenges Court Governance Policies</i>	<i>Highly Likely</i>

The overall group assessed this scenario as having a 1.6 probability; both NACM and non-NACM members assessed the scenario as Highly Likely, NACM members: 1.5 likelihood; non-NACM respondents: 1.6 probability.

We are already looking at our 2027 survey and want to hear what you think we should ask. Also, let us know of anyone who might be interested in participating in the next survey. Email your suggestions to courtutures@gmail.com.

ⁱ Survey	Total Responses	NACM Responses	Percentage
2014	510	120	23.5%
2015	493	137	27.8%
2016	369	119	32.2%
2017	391	132	33.8%
2018	352	155	44.0%
2019	398	216	54.3%
2020	412	238	57.8%
2021	358	170	47.5%
2022	321	156	48.6%
2023	289	159	55.0%
2024	206	126	61.2%
2025	209	119	56.9%
2026	287	140	48.7%

ⁱⁱ U.S. Marshals Service, official threat statistics page: <https://www.usmarshals.gov/what-we-do/judicial-security/protective-investigations-threat-statistics>

ⁱⁱⁱ ORDR — Zero Trust Statistics 2026 Report

^{iv} Texas Office of Court Administration, 2024 Court Personnel Workload Analysis

^v California Administrative Office of the Courts “Shortage of Court Reporters in California” July 2026.

^{vi} Pew Research Center, "8 Facts About Divorce, Marriage and Remarriage in the United States," Oct. 16, 2025. <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2025/10/16/8-facts-about-divorce-in-the-united-states/>

^{vii} NCSC's 2008 *Trends in the State Courts*

^{viii} U.S. Courts, "Priority 5: Realizing Technology's Full Value and Managing Its Risks," *Strategic Plan for the Federal Judiciary* (2025), Strategy 5.1.d. <https://www.uscourts.gov/data-news/reports/strategic-planning/strategic-plan-federal-judiciary/priority-5-realizing-technologys-full-value-and-managing-its-risks>